



## King's Research Portal

### *Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Collins-Greenslade, K., & Farnum, R. L. (Ed.) (2015). How do various media portray gender issues in the Middle East? *The Scholar*, 1(3), 56-58. <http://www.thebrilliantclub.org/category/the-scholar/>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# HOW DO VARIOUS MEDIA PORTRAY GENDER ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

K. Collins Greenslade, supervised by R. Farnum

## Abstract

This essay critically compares and contrasts how gender roles in the Middle East are presented in various media. Particular focus is given to the portrayal of male feminists, a group rarely discussed in either Western or Middle Eastern news. Stories from a variety of sources originating from the United Kingdom, United States, and the Middle East will be used to show how the same issue is presented differently across regions. This comparison will be used as a case study to consider the greater issue of media bias in society.

## Body

The main source of information on current events for people is the media. Whether in the form of newspapers, news reports on the television, or online reports the media influences the way in which we perceive the world. Factors influencing news articles include the writer of the report, the newspaper in which it appears and the country from which it originates. The opinions and information presented may vary, despite the story being based on the same event that has occurred, due to the amount of bias from the opinions of the reporter and the general direction of opinions from the newspaper. If a newspaper is considered a credible source, then it is more likely to be considered as a source that produces a correct unbiased opinion. However, it is difficult to find an unbiased article and more often than not, the media reports what it feels is a worthy article and can manipulate the facts to give their opinion of the story more evidence without lying. This is particularly clear when stereotypes are discussed, especially stereotypes of gender, as these change dramatically depending on the policies and opinions that the newspaper follows. Ideas surrounding the Middle East are particularly biased, as stereotyping about gender in the Middle East is very extreme and Western newspapers have strong opinions on what gender equality is and means. Bias within the media is an issue because the majority of people do not read further into the truth of the newspapers, as we are led to believe that these newspapers only report the truth. However, it is possible to make the information have an opinion in it without presenting information that is false, and so we are influenced by the way that the media talks about the world around us and all its issues.

The topic I have chosen to cover, believing that it is infrequently discussed, is the way that gender in the Middle East is presented. I will place an emphasis on the men of the Middle East, as men are usually presented as women’s oppressors. Although this is sometimes the case, rarely are the men from the Middle East who believe that women deserve equality talked about. Women from the Middle East are often talked about being forced to do things (e.g., wearing a hijab, whereas in many cases the women believe that they should wear it and it can be a personal choice). While I do believe that women are frequently oppressed by men and that some views presented by the media are correct, I also believe that some men are unfairly presented. In modern Western society, the media tells us that women are equal to men. In reality, major inequalities remain (in, for example, working environments regarding pay, representation in leadership positions, and stereotypes of gendered careers), but because we are told by the media that our society is equal and have our own stereotypes about gender and gender equality, when we look at other cultures, we often see them as oppressing women. This judgment can go both ways: people in the Middle East often believe the same about our culture, seeing women in the West as being oppressed (for example, by gendered fashion trends and advertising pressures). There are, without doubt, restrictions on women in both societies, and many women could speak of the

unfairness in which they are treated, but in the media, virtually all women in the Middle East are presented as being too weak and scared for their lives to try to change things, or attempting protests but failing, whereas men are presented as being violent oppressors who don’t want to see change in their society. Throughout the media, some sources are seen as more credible, but even these sometimes show bias on these subjects. I believe this issue must be further discussed so that people can make their own decisions about the actual state of gender equality currently in the Middle East.

A recent gendered issue occurring in the Middle East was the murder of Farkhunda in Afghanistan after being accused by a group of men of burning pages of the *Qur’an* (Islam’s holy book). There were many protests in the capital of Kabul over her death, and it was talked about in the media all over the world. On the 19th March 2015, a group of men “beat a 27-year-old religious scholar named Farkhunda to death, threw her body off a roof, ran over it with a car, set it on fire and threw it into the Kabul river nearby”.<sup>[1]</sup> The president of Afghanistan called for an investigation into her death; it is currently believed that she was falsely accused. Following her death, there were large protests by both male and female protesters, including some where people wore masks of Farkhunda’s face and another led by a group of men wearing burkas (long black robes generally covering everything but the eyes) as a protest for women’s rights. International Women’s Day was celebrated 8th March 2015; between these two events, there was a good amount of media coverage around these issues causing many people to become divided on the subject of equality and whether it has been achieved by societies within the Middle East and all over the world.

Whilst researching this topic, I discovered a blog talking about a group of Afghan men protesting in Afghanistan. An article by *The Telegraph* on this event briefly introduces the group of men, who were protesting for women’s rights by wearing blue burkas. The newspaper linked this to the upcoming International Women’s Day. The article also discussed how the men wanted to do this to understand how women felt every day and talked about how they “carried signs reading: ‘equality’, and ‘Don’t tell women what to wear, you should cover your eyes’”.<sup>[2]</sup> The article also discussed how women in Afghanistan were “forced”<sup>[2]</sup> to wear burqas when they were out in public, and went into a brief amount of detail about how the men’s protest was received by the public. It gave reasons against the protest by the public and reasons for by the group of men that staged the protest. The newspaper that wrote this article, *The Telegraph*, is UK-based and is known for being fairly conservative, and so does show some bias. The bias is not extreme, and you are able to separate the truth from the opinion, but it does help to check with other newspapers as subtle opinions can alter the way that we view an event that has occurred. This newspaper is overall known for being quite reliable, even if only compared to other newspapers. This particular article was written by Radhika Sanghani, a regular writer for *The Telegraph* and its “Telegraph Wonder Women” section. The majority of her articles are about feminism and why our planet needs more equality for the different genders. This suggests that the article is more for the protests than against, and thus a biased article. This article also includes the phrase “for many people, has come to symbolize the suppression of women” when talking about the burqas that the men wore in protest. This suggests that the newspaper believes that the burqas are a symbol of oppression, which is an extremely biased view. The use of “for many people”<sup>[2]</sup> makes it

seem less biased, as the writer is acknowledging that not everyone sees it this way; however, I believe that this shows the writer’s true opinion, and this bias informs the rest of the article and how she chooses to present information.

The second article I will discuss is about six women killed in Afghanistan for joining the police. It talks about how the women of Afghanistan have been treated since the Taliban took over and how women are viewed within the country. It focuses on how policewomen are seen as dishonorable to their families, and how they are beaten and abused by men, including fellow police officers. This article is featured in the *New York Times*, a newspaper based in New York, USA. It is a slightly leftwing newspaper but is considered a mainly credible source. The article was written by Alissa J. Rubin with input from Lynsey Addario, a well-known photojournalist with her own website and published book who is known for “photographs, features and breaking news focused on humanitarian and human rights issues across the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa”<sup>[3]</sup>. While both contributors have experience and knowledge of similar issues around the world, the article appears to be quite biased, speaking of the issue of the female police officers in Afghanistan in a tone supporting the women rather than as a neutral tone. Opinions from both sides are presented, but the side and opinions of the women is dramatically more biased. Phrases such as “Taliban curse”<sup>[5]</sup> when talking about how things changed when the Taliban came to power highlight the author’s views about the events that took place. Most of the words and phrases used make the reader feel sorry for the women; this is a running theme throughout.

The last article that I found to answer my question was titled “Thousands march in Kabul over mob killing of woman”. This article also covers the death of Farkhunda, the Afghan woman murdered by a group of men after “being falsely accused of burning a Quran”<sup>[4]</sup> and the protests that took place within Kabul. It is an article featured on the *Al Jazeera* website, a news broadcaster based in Qatar (a country within the Middle East on the Persian Gulf). *Al Jazeera* is owned by the government of Qatar and does show bias towards certain political groups. The article does not tell you who wrote it, possibly suggesting that it was written by a group of journalists that collectively wrote the article by putting together all of the information that they had discovered on the issue. This could mean that it is more reliable because it is a collective of opinions and information, or it could mean that it is more unreliable, authored by a very biased and/or untrained writer. The article includes interviews with many of the protesters, who were both male and female, but does not interview anyone that was against the protest. I believe that the article was written in either Afghanistan, the place that the article talks about or Qatar, where *Al Jazeera* are based, but as the article does not have a byline, it is unclear where the article was written from or with which background. The article does repeat the word “brutal” throughout, suggesting that the author or authors do not agree with what took place. They also use the word “bitter” to describe the election campaign that took place, where the president “promised to champion women’s constitutional rights, end corruption and bring peace”.<sup>[4]</sup> This is also a biased opinion which could change the way that people view the president.

These three articles have been written in three different countries by three different newspapers, each with different biases, although all three are considered as giving authoritative knowledge to the public. They all show bias, though you are still able to pick out the factual events from the opinion. The articles all talk about different, but similar issues; however, they present them in different ways. They all give opinions about gender equality, even if these opinions are not clear, as the reader may have to read into the articles before they find the bias. *The Telegraph* presents the men who protested by wearing burkas as men who believe that both genders should be equal and talked about how they were wearing them for the upcoming International Women’s Day. The article talked about how the

men wanted to understand how women felt in everyday society and this article gave opinions from men who were against the protest, minimising its bias by presenting multiple views, but did not go into much detail. It showed men as wanting to protest but did not give any quotes from women who agreed with what the men were doing; instead only giving opinions of those who were against it. I was unable to find any news of this by an American newspaper on the first two pages of searching for it on *Google*, and the only other mention of this event was a one-sentence mention in *Voice of America* when discussing International Women’s Day. After this point the articles became irrelevant to the issue. The article written by *The New York Times* shows women as only wanting to be equal and does not give examples of women stating that they think a woman working for the police is wrong, other than an elderly woman in one of the police women’s family. It portrays men as being cruel and violating the women, and although these events did occur, they only include a short quote from one man with the article stating “Colonel Mirakai, who supports having more policewomen, sighed. ‘The police commanders I work with say: ‘We don’t need them to work with us until noon and go home; instead of female police, send us male police.’” he said, alluding to the reality that many women have to leave work early to care for their families”.<sup>[5]</sup> *The New York Times* article portrays women as not having power over their own lives, whereas the article by *Al Jazeera* talks about men and women protesting alongside each other, and has an equal number of male and female for arguments. However, it only mentions the men who murdered Farkhunda as being against the protests.

Male feminists are thus barely mentioned at all in most articles on gender issues in the Middle East. However, my finding that male feminists are not talked about by the media could be because it is a relatively new concept. This idea was brought up when I interviewed a male feminist and Kurdish (a minority ethnic group) Iraqi, Ayaz. He gives talks on feminism and when asked about the frequency of the portrayal of male feminists from the Middle East, he stated “I only know a few male feminists in the Middle East and there is little media about male feminism overall. Male feminism is new to the region. Even female feminism has not yet developed here in its own Eastern version – it is overly influenced by Western values and Western models of feminism. So for this reason, perhaps, male feminism is still in its infancy. Certainly there are many men who support better treatment of women overall and less violence and better laws, for example. But few men have challenged those power structures that keep women in their places. Perhaps because in many Middle East countries coming out of the Arab Spring, even men are not protected fully by the laws and suffer greatly from ongoing corruption and injustice”. All of these reasons could be the reasons for why male feminism is rarely covered by the media, especially if feminism in the Middle East is still in its “infancy”. However, Ayaz clearly has strong opinions on the matter. When asked why he believes gender equality is important, he talked of the overall effect total gender equality could bring: “With true gender equality, where women had full access to her human rights for safety, employment, shelter, education and health care, women would live longer and more productive lives. They would contribute more to their families and communities. As a result their children would also be healthier, their marriages would probably be better and their overall quality of life and well being would improve”. This shows that even if gender equality is still a new concept, there are men from the Middle East who feel very strongly about the equality of all genders – yet this is rarely talked about in news coverage.

The way that men and women in the Middle East are portrayed by newspapers varies, with factors such as the country it was written in, the political views of the newspaper and the methods of research and fact-finding influencing content and presentation. *The Telegraph* portrays men and women in the Middle East as being unequal, and possibly deteriorating



further: “Progress for women's rights has been made in recent years, but human rights organizations are worried that much of that is now being undone” <sup>[2]</sup>. The article goes on to suggest that men are divided on the issue, including a quote from a man who asserted that “I wouldn't let them [women] go out without one [a burka]” <sup>[2]</sup>. *The New York Times* presented women as wanting change and trying to make things equal, but as struggling to carry on against the number of men who are against them. This makes it sound like the situation in Afghanistan is not good for women and this also supports the article by *The Telegraph*. The third article, also focused on Afghanistan, makes women seem independent, standing up for their rights. While this is at first glance similar to *The New York Times* piece, the article from *Al Jazeera* makes it sound like large groups protest about women and how they are treated regularly, while *The New York Times*’ writing suggests that this is a rare thing. The article by **AI Jazeera** also implies that the government was trying to change rights for the better for women, something that the other two articles did not address. All of the articles are quite biased, but they are all considered credible despite the fact that they let their own opinions get in the way.

Each of the articles explored above examines a slightly different topic and they differ in the way that they present their story, but all are trying to inform their readers about what is happening with men and women in the Middle East. Each of the articles presents gender equality differently, especially the pieces from the UK and America. This could be because the media has been influenced by their government’s decision to go to war in Afghanistan. These countries may also present gender in different ways, as they are predominantly Christian countries and so view Islamic countries in a different way to how other Islamic countries would generally see them. In the West, we have been taught that our society has gender equality. But our society may seem for many others around the world like their society – or worse – in terms of gender relations and power. Given the way everyone has been brought up, the media along with schools and parents socialise gender relations and assumptions about other cultures in us. The media has a large impact in all of these places, because it is not only our main source of information locally but also our primary way of finding out what is happening in the world. I think that the way in which the news presents its facts can change the way we see the world, and that if we do not critically read everything we see, we can be persuaded by the newspaper to unquestioningly believe what they write and thus adopt their biases and stereotypes. This means the media has a huge amount of power as a trusted, credible source. Thanks to this course, I am going to read more critically and try to think about things from the perspective of the people written about. I have enjoyed looking into the way that the media portrays various issues, as I believe it is something that people do not talk about enough. Overall, this exercise has taught me to not just look at an event from one person’s point of view or the mainstream presentation in the news. Ayaz and other people in the Middle East have an entirely different perspective on and knowledge about gender relations in that region than the ones I have regular access to through Western media outlets. I believe it is important for us to fully consider these multiple perspectives when dealing with complex issues. We would be a more informed society if the media were to present these nuances with less bias, be it implicit or explicit, in reporting trends.

## Bibliography

- [1] Associated Press in Kabul. The Guardian 23 March 2015. “Afghan protesters march to demand justice for woman killed by mob”. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/23/afghan-protesters-demand-justice-for-woman-killed-by-mob-farkhunda>
- [2] Sanghani, Radhika. The Telegraph 6 March 2015. “Afghan men wear burqas to campaign for women's rights”. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11453879/Afghan-men-wear-burqas-to-campaign-for-womens-rights.html>
- [3] Addario, Lynsey. “Bio”. Accessed 21 June 2015. <http://www.lynseyaddario.com/info/bio/>
- [4] Al Jazeera Agencies. Al Jazeera 24 March 2015. “Thousands march in Kabul over mob killing of woman”. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/afghanistan-kabul-farkhunda-march-150324134218403.html>
- [5] Rubin, Alissa J. The New York Times 1 March 2015. “Afghan Policewomen Struggle Against Culture”. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/02/world/asia/afghan-policewomen-struggle-against-culture.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/02/world/asia/afghan-policewomen-struggle-against-culture.html?_r=0)

## Appendix: Author’s Email Interview with Ayaz, a Kurdish Iraqi Male Feminist, April 2015

K.: Why is gender equality important?

Ayaz: Gender equality is equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities, and society at large. With true gender equality, where women had full access to her human rights for safety, employment, shelter, education and health care, women would live longer and more productive lives. They would contribute more to their families and communities. As a result their children would also be healthier, their marriages would probably be better and their overall quality of life and well being would improve. Less obviously though, if equality was not such a struggle over limited rights, women and men might get along better and most certainly women and women relationships would improve without constant competition for the best education, the best jobs, the best husbands. Frankly, equality and constant competition among men has the same negative effect and is the root of the power struggles behind families, communities and nations in conflict.

K.: Do you think male feminists portrayed by the media are talked about enough?

Ayaz: I only know a few male feminists in the Middle East and there is little media about male feminism overall. Male feminism is new to the region. Even female feminism has not yet developed here in its own eastern version – it is overly influenced by western values and western models of feminism. So for this reason, perhaps, male feminism is still in its infancy. Certainly there are many men who support better treatment of women overall and less violence and better laws, for example. But few men have challenged those power structures that keep women in their places. Perhaps because in many Middle East countries coming out of the Arab Spring, even men are not protected fully by the laws and suffer greatly from ongoing corruption and injustice.

### About the authors

K. is a Year 9 pupil at Hayes School. Rebecca L. Farnum is studying for her PhD at King’s College London in Geography focussing on environmental peacebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa.

### PhD Tutor’s note

This assignment asked students to choose a topic interesting to them and compare how it was represented differently in various media outlets. K. did a fantastic job over the course of her tutorials and profiled her learning incredibly well in this essay. I was particularly impressed by K.’s initiative in conducting her own interview (via monitored email) with a self-identifying Kurdish Iraqi male feminist. She synthesises both her primary data and various sources of secondary data well for a coherent and critical yet personally informed consideration of complex questions of gender and global politics.

# ARE HUMANS SELF-INTERESTED OR SYMPATHETIC?

S. Miller, supervised by F. Morett

## Introduction

In this essay, I argue that humans are self-interested, not sympathetic. In doing so I rely on Bernard Mandeville’s psychological theory of universal self-interest, and I make a contrast with David Hume’s combined psychological theory of sympathy and self-interest. The analysis and evaluation of these two theories is done by using three criteria for choosing among competing scientific theories, namely inductive support, simplicity, and *experimentum crucis*. And I also use modern day examples from within society.

## Discussion. Part I

Mandeville explains how all animals are self-interested and only care about pleasing themselves, but are split into two varying severities. Mandeville (1) argues that “all untaught animals are only solicitous of pleasing themselves” and that “naturally” they follow “the bent of their own inclinations”, doing so “without considering the good or harm” that others may receive. Mandeville believed that you cannot persuade or teach anyone to go against their “natural inclinations” to “prefer the good of others to their own”.

Some people may say that you can persuade someone to go against their own inclinations, however when you look deeper, people only change out of self-interest. For example, a business-man’s sister told him that what he was doing was selfish and that he should become a charity giver. If that man didn’t become a charity giver he may lose his relationship with his sister and regret not giving to charity. So by giving to charity he receives the emotional gain and love from his sister, therefore changing out of self-interest.

All animals have to be self-interested to survive. If an animal does not hunt for food, shelter and dominance, it will die. So “naturally” it does follow “the bent of” its own “inclinations” (1). This leads me to another point. I have observed that self-interest is misunderstood. When describing an act of self-interest we seem to portray it in a negative way, but I argue it is not. It is not selfish to act in self-interest, it is natural and vital for survival. Therefore, when animals “naturally” follow “the bent of their own inclinations”, that is not negative, nor are they selfish, without their self-interest they could not exist. As a result, this proves my claim, because every person living on this planet must be self-interested.

Also, the feelings of serenity, contentment and happiness derived from acts of charity are almost impossible to avoid, so is that self-interest? I believe that if someone does something or an incident occurs without your input that makes you feel those feelings, that is not self-interest. However, if you commit an act in order to receive those feelings, you are doing so in the interest of yourself, out of self-interest. Now, as we know that in every person there is self-interest, we can disprove the aspect of sympathy. When we think of a “sympathetic” act, we usually think of charity giving, be that money, food or clothes.

David Hume believed that there were two strands of human nature, ‘benevolence’ and ‘self-love’. We can refer to ‘benevolence’ as sympathy. We know an example of ‘benevolence’ that Hume (2) uses when he says that “from him the hungry receive food, the naked clothing, the ignorant and slothful skill and industry”. The man giving to others may be considered by Hume and others to be sympathetic, but I believe he did what he did for the personal gain that he’d receive. People he tells or who see him giving charity will praise him and his

pride will be fed. He will get a good feeling from giving to charity, meaning he is likely to do it again.

Mandeville (1) argues that “the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride”. This means that when we behave well, our pride is fed. We are praised and flattered because of what we have done, so much so that the personal gain we receive from committing an act outweighs the sympathy involved in the act itself. Alternatively, people may believe that if someone gives to charity anonymously and discretely, then they’re truly sympathetic. However, if that person hadn’t given to charity they may feel an emotional loss such as guilt and regret, so by giving to charity they feel a kind of emotional gain. As a result, ‘truly sympathetic’ acts are disproved on the grounds that they are done for the gain that the performer of the act will receive.

I believe that there are varying levels of self-interest, as did Mandeville. He believed that the (1) “whole species” is divided into two classes, each class being “true representatives of their sublime species”. One consisting of “abject, low-minded people” who have “no aim higher than their private advantage”. The other class is made up of “lofty high-spirited creatures” who are not “sordid” or “selfish”, who despise “whatever they had in common with irrational creatures [the first class]”. Both classes are ones of self-interest but “the first class by more degrees”. I think this is true, because we can consider businessmen and people like the members of ‘Dragon’s Den’. If we imagine a scale of self-interest, they would be at the top because they care only about their wealth and success, by investing money and by picking up and dropping employees. They could be compared to a charity giver. As said earlier I think that people give to charity for the gain that they will receive, whether that be abolishment of regret, pride or flattery.

The level of self-interest in charitable giving is hard to gauge, because if a rich person gives a huge amount of money, which is only a small percentage of his or her wealth, is that better than if a very poor person gives a little amount, which is a high percentage of his or her wealth. The rich person will receive more emotional gain because they gave a higher amount. As we can observe, the levels of self-interest of the business man and charity giver are different.

Three criteria can be used for choosing between Mandeville’s psychological theory of universal self-interest, and the combined theory of self-interest and sympathy from Hume. Fernando Morett (3) explains that ‘inductive support’ is “the number of positive instances collected supporting a hypothesis or claim”. From source four we know that an *experimentum crucis* or crucial experiment is a “crucial experiment” used to “demonstrate the true character of a hypothesis or claim”, “one positive instance seems to be enough”. From the textbook (4) we know that “many philosophers of science and scientists” believe “it seems better to choose theories postulating fewer causes. Therefore, simpler theories should be chosen over their more complex rivals”.

When it comes to ‘inductive support’, Mandeville is a clear winner. From source eight we know that (3) “unlike Hume, Mandeville does consider whether statesmen, patriots, mothers, friends and lovers act because of self-interested motives such as being flattered, adored and glorified”. Again from the same source (3) we know that Mandeville’s observations and surveying are more reliable because “he discusses different